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## Universal Human Values: Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis

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### Abstract

The article is aimed at analyzing universal human values from the cross-cultural perspective. The research is based on the analysis of questionnaires completed by the Russians living in and outside the Russian Federation as well as foreign citizens. The questionnaires are focused on revealing respondents' attitude to nationality, national values and traditions, universal values and traditions as well as peculiarities of socio-cultural interaction among representatives of different nationalities. The authors of the article come to the conclusion that the main values bringing nations together include cooperation, communication and kindness as the basic means of human interaction, whereas the main reasons of misunderstanding among nations are connected with lack of coordination in the sphere of politics, different mentalities and religious intolerance.

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### 1. Introduction

Universal human values as a complex of vitally important values, connecting an individual with society and creating a unity of man and the world, have developed along with development of human civilizations. Inculcating universal human values together with preserving national identity is considered by the authors of this article as an obligatory condition for integration into the international educational space. According to A.S. Kolesnikov (2013), orientation towards development of personality and recovery of universal human values find reflection in modern conception of continuing education. N.N. Nikitina (2015) emphasizes "the necessity of observing parity when representing cultural norms and traditions of different nationalities in the contents of educational system". However

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the notion of universal human values still lacks clear definition. Logically and theoretically this expression presupposes maintaining opportunities for every individual to live a full life. All in all “the system of values is determined by ethnic, ideological, religious priorities and preferences prevailing in a certain ethnic group; this system is transmitted from generation to generation via family upbringing and school education, literature, art, mass media. The system of values determines relations in the family, at work, in social and political spheres, in the sphere of scientific and technical creativity as well as interaction among ethnic groups, nations, states, civilizations” (Kalandia, 2004).

Philosophical research works point out cultural values (freedom, creativity, love, communication, activity), moral values (purpose of life, happiness, good, duty, responsibility, conscience, honour, dignity), aesthetic values (beauty), religious values (faith), scientific (verity), political values (peace, justice, democracy), legal values (law and order). In modern times of global changes the values of good and tolerance become especially significant. According to E.I. Passov (2004, p. 57) “creating the need to understand different points of view on social and human problems, to achieve agreement and cooperate despite the differences of opinions” is the element of upbringing in the process of acquisition of a foreign culture and international and cross-cultural communication. Personal values shed light on modern world events.

We believe that comparative cross-cultural investigation on international values can help in establishing a successful dialogue among cultures. Participating in a cross-cultural dialogue an individual comes across various problems, connected with adequate sense transmission when working with representatives of different cultures and values. R. Brislin (1981) and H. Triandis (1990) focus their research on methodology of cross-cultural analysis.

The national character is the category, reflecting the outer form of expressing mentality as a whole as well as stereotypes of behaviour, psychological inclinations, emotional and volitional reactions, behavioural tendencies of a nation. The national character is believed to include a set of features which predetermine interpretations of different phenomena by the representatives of a certain nation.

The national character, according to K. Kasyanova (1994), is “a society within us”, which is expressed in standardized emotional reactions on everyday events produced by people belonging to the same culture.

It is quite frequent that our attitude to a new acquaintance is determined by common stereotypes about the national character of the people he belongs to: Georgian hospitality, English restraint etc. Such attitudes and opinions belong to the group of ethnic stereotypes representing a unified idea about characteristic features of a nation, which can be real or imaginary. In culture studies a distinction is made between auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes, the former including the nation’s opinion about itself, the latter representing views on other nations. Thus, the object of our research is auto- and hetero-stereotypes about the Russians.

By the term “the Russians” we understand the citizens of the Russian Federation regardless of their nationality (ethnic Russians, Tartars, Ukrainians, Bashkirs, Chuvash, Jews etc.) and faith (Orthodox, Buddhist, Catholic, Judaism, Muslim etc.).

## **2. Objectives, Methodology and Research Design**

Our research is based on questionnaire analysis, questionnaires being distributed among the Russian residents, the Russians, living abroad, and foreign citizens. The aim of our research is to compare the respondents’ opinions on national and universal values and traditions in order to use the obtained results for proper interaction among representatives of different cultures.

To achieve the aims of research the authors of the article constructed a questionnaire entitled as “Nationalities, Values and Traditions as Regulators of People’s Behaviour and Interaction”. The total of 294 Russian respondents participated in the questionnaire study, the number corresponding to 100%. The total of 96 foreign respondents participated in the questionnaire study, the number corresponding to 100%.

## **3. Discussion of the Research Outcomes**

Though the number of respondents in two groups is unequal we believe that it is possible to come to certain conclusions at this preliminary stage of research.

The following demographic data were taken into consideration when analyzing the results of questionnaire study: education, age, occupation, nationality, citizenship. The sample distribution by these criteria is represented below.

Most respondents in the sample have post-school qualifications (92%), including 46% of respondents with higher education qualifications; 8% of respondents do not have any post-school qualifications. Thus, the sphere of professional interests of the majority of respondents is determined. As for 8% of respondents lacking post-school qualifications, this group includes students aged 16 – 19.

Most respondents in the sample are from 16 to 50 years old (95%), which allows us to characterize respondents as professionally and socially active. The fact that 64% of respondents belong to the sphere of education shows the significance of the issue of nationality, values and traditions as regulators of people's behaviour and interaction to educators whose profession is directly connected with setting values. As questionnaires were distributed on the territory of the Russian Federation, 64% of respondents are Russians; 33% of respondents are the representatives of other nationalities; 88.4% of respondents are Russian citizens; 5.6% of respondents are the citizens of the Community of Independent States (CIS) and other countries.

The questionnaire includes the following parts:

1. Nationality, national values, traditions;
2. Universal implications, values and traditions;
3. Socio-cultural interaction.

The format employed in research questions included multiple choice questions and open-ended questions, the latter giving the opportunity for the respondents to express their own opinion. The questionnaire analysis is provided below.

The first set of questions concerns respondents' nationality as well as national values and traditions. Answering the question "How significant for you is your nationality?" both Russian and foreign respondents admitted that nationality is very important for them (58% in both subject groups). We believe that it is due to the sense of pride in belonging to a certain community of people rather than the expression of nationalism. About 33% of foreign respondents and 25% of Russian respondents say that the issue of nationality does not matter much for them, Russian respondents showing lower percentage of such answers. 10% of Russian respondents find it difficult to define the significance of nationality in their system of values, whereas none of foreign respondents chose this option. 7% of Russian respondents and 9% of foreign respondents say that nationality does not matter for them (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. How significant for you is your nationality?

	Highly significant	Not very significant	Difficult to answer	Not significant
Russian	58%	25%	10%	7%
Foreign	58%	33%	0%	9%

When answering the question "What values and traditions are highly typical of your nation?" the respondents were suggested to consider the following aspects of this question: family values, civil values and spiritual values (see results in Table 2 – 4).

Table 2. Respondents' family values

	Russian	Foreign
Child birth and upbringing	39%	13%
Care for parents	19%	21%
Responsibility	16%	20%
Love	10%	24%
Faithfulness	8%	19%
Difficult to answer	4%	1.50%
Other	4%	1.50%

Table 3. Respondents' civil values

	Russian	Foreign
Patriotism	42%	16%
Financial well-being	23%	20%
Freedom of speech	13%	26%
Legal protection	8%	22%
Difficult to answer	9%	0%
Other	5%	3%

Table 4. Respondents' spiritual values

	Russian	Foreign
Sympathy with other people's grief	29%	21%
Help and support	24.60%	33%
Respect for national traditions	17%	16%
Following moral principles	14%	14%
Respect for national traditions of other nations	7.80%	12%
Difficult to answer	7%	3%
Other	0.60%	0%

Considering family values all the respondents primarily point out giving birth to children and their upbringing, care for parents, responsibility and love. Patriotism, financial well-being and freedom of speech are the civil values typical of the Russian respondents. The most frequent answers (in both respondent groups) about spiritual values include sympathy with other people's troubles, help and support, respect for national traditions of their country, following moral principles.

While answering the question "Do you follow any national values?" 53% Russian respondents gave the answer "always", such answer being less frequent among foreign respondents (31%) (see Table 5).

Thus, more than a half of respondents report that they always hold national values and follow national traditions, which is expressed in organizing or participating in national holidays as well as in family relations (Table 6).

Table 5. Answers to the question "Do you follow any national values?"

	Russian	Foreign
Always	53%	31%
Seldom	34%	54%
Difficult to answer	12%	3.50%
Never	1%	7.50%

Table 6. Answers to the question "If you follow any national values and traditions, how is it expressed?"

	Russian	Foreign
In organizing national holidays and participating in them	52%	33%
In family relations	35%	58%
In supporting state policy	7%	9%
Difficult to answer	3%	0%
Other	3%	0%

Hence the most significant national traditions as pointed out by the respondents include holidays, ceremonies, followed by industry and family values. Besides it is peculiar that patriotism as a national tradition is pointed out by 22% of foreign respondents compared to a much lower rate (2%) among Russian respondents. Thus, patriotism as a civil value is rated highest by Russian respondents (42%), which contradicts the interpretation of patriotism as part of personal behaviour concerning following traditions (2%). Besides it is interesting to point at the fact that unlike the foreign sample such items as national folklore, music and obeying the law lack in the Russian sample as national traditions. On the other hand, foreign respondents do not mention respect for adults or older people, hospitality, mutual help as significant.

When answering the question “What is your attitude to the fact that other nations of the world want to keep their language, national values and traditions?”, the majority of respondents of both groups gave a positive answer, supporting this idea (Table 7).

Table 7. Answers to the question “What is your attitude to the fact that other nations of the world want to keep their language, national values and traditions?”

	Russian	Foreign
Positive	89%	83%
Negative	0%	17%
Indifferent	7%	0%
Difficult to answer	4%	0%

The second set of questions concerns universal implications, values and traditions. Answers to the question “What is your attitude to the process of globalization when the world is striving for the union of nations based on common social implications, values, traditions?” are reflected in Table 8 below.

Thus, more than a half of Russian respondents (64%) are positive about the process of globalization leading to common social implications, values, and traditions. The number of positive answers among foreign respondents is lower (42%) which can be connected with the fact that the Europeans have experienced the process of globalization and do not totally support the idea of unified values and traditions. This conclusion is proved by the fact that according to our survey 25% of foreign respondents are negative about globalization and uniting peoples on the basis of common social implications, values, and traditions.

Table 8. Answers to the question “What is your attitude to the process of globalization when the world is striving for the union of nations based on common social implications, values, traditions?”

	Russian	Foreign
Positive	64%	42%
Negative	17%	25%
Indifferent	10%	8%
Difficult to answer	9%	25%

Answers to the question “Do you support the idea about a single multi-national people, united by common social implications, values, traditions?” are given below (see Table 9).

Table 9. Answers to the question “Do you support the idea about a single multi-national people, united by common social implications, values, traditions?”

	Russian	Foreign
No	87%	83%
Yes	6%	8.5%
Difficult to answer	5%	0%

Indifferent	2%	8.5%
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While answering the question “Which values belong to universal human values providing understanding among people of different cultures?” Russian respondents primarily pointed out family values (43%). Among foreign respondents the answers naming the values of tolerance (24%) and respect (20%) are the most frequent, whereas Russian respondents did not mark tolerance and respect as significant as well as humanity, moral values and human rights (0%). Only 4% of foreign respondents believe family values to be part of universal human values which provide understanding among people of different cultures. Such results can be explained by the predominance of patriarchal family values in the Russian culture, unlike the foreign societies following the rules of political correctness and democracy, where the principles of tolerance and respect as well as humanity become prevalent. The reason why Russian respondents do not mark moral values as uniting factors can be connected with the fact that they differentiate their moral values and foreign moral values.

The next most frequent answers in the Russian sample are the values of sympathy (15%) and trust (13%). The value of sympathy is pointed out by 12% of foreign respondents, the rate, similar to that in the Russian sample. Besides when answering this question 16% of foreign respondents and 20% of Russian respondents chose the option “other”, mentioning detailed personalized values which are difficult to classify as they do not correspond to commonly accepted values.

Answers to the next question “What is the role of religion in forming universal human values?” are given in Table 10.

Table 10. Answers to the question “What is the role of religion in forming universal human values?”

	Russian	Foreign
Significant	86%	82%
Not very significant	6%	0%
Difficult to answer	5%	9%
Not significant	3%	9%

The majority of Russian and foreign respondents (86% and 82%) state that religion plays an important part in forming universal human values. Such results can be explained by the fact that most respondents consider themselves as belonging to Christian religion. The general tendency to keep spiritual traditions in the world via religion can also be a factor. 3% of Russian respondents and 9% of foreign respondents denied the role of religion, the data in the Russian sample being connected with reduction of atheists diminishing the role of religion. At the same time this aspect in the foreign sample is rated slightly higher compared to the Russian sample which can show some atheist tendencies among foreign respondents, participating in our survey.

Answers to the question “Which religion promotes understanding and friendship among representatives of different nationalities?” are provided in Table 11.

Table 11. Answers to the question “Which religion promotes understanding and friendship among representatives of different nationalities?”

	Russian	Foreign
Christianity	50.7%	19%
Bhuddism	17%	30%
Islam	0.3%	5%
Judaism	0.3%	0%
None	2%	8%
All	0.7%	5%
Difficult to answer	15%	30%
Other	14%	3%

Answers to the question demonstrate the general positive attitude to the idea of uniting peoples on the basis of common values and traditions. However most respondents do not support the idea about a single multi-national people, united by common social implications, values, and traditions. Such contradictory opinions can be due to every people's wish to keep its identity and mother tongue along with having the opportunity to interact with representatives of other cultures, sharing universal human values.

Among universal values the respondents primarily mention family relations as well as sympathy, trust and patriotism. The respondents have the same opinion about the role of religion in forming universal values with half of respondents considering Christianity as a possible basis for building understanding among nations and cultures and 1/5 of all respondents attributing this role to Buddhism. 15% of respondents find it hard to answer this question, possibly due to the lack of competence in religious matters.

The third set of questions concerns socio-cultural interaction. Answers to the question "Name the main reasons of misunderstanding among nations" are shown below.

According to the answers from the Russian sample the roots of misunderstanding among nations are 1) lack of coordination in political sphere (27.5%); 2) different mentality of nations (26.8%); 3) religious intolerance (20.5%). At the same time the most frequent answer among foreign respondents is "religious intolerance" (28%), followed by "different national traditions" (20%) and "different mentality of nations" (19%). The frequency of answers coincides in items "religious intolerance" and "different mentality of nations". Respondents of two groups differ in such items as "lack of coordination in political sphere" and "different national traditions". Thus Russian respondents connect the reasons of misunderstanding with political issues whereas foreign respondents believe that these reasons lie in the spheres of religion and culture (traditions).

The next question concerns the reasons of present-day political and socio-cultural confrontation between Europe and Russia.

Answering this question Russian respondents again refer to political issues, naming struggle for world leadership (48%) as the basis of present-day political and socio-cultural confrontation between Europe and Russia. The next most frequent answer in the Russian sample is "different mentality" (37%). The same answers are marked as the most frequent in the foreign sample which testifies to similarity of opinions about the political and mental reasons of confrontation between Europe and Russia among Russian and foreign respondents. As we mentioned earlier political issues are viewed by Russian respondents as the root of intercultural misunderstanding, however foreign respondents mention this reason only as an answer to the question more explicitly indicating the possibility of political reasons. Incidentally, religious intolerance is not marked by foreign respondents as a possible reason of confrontation.

Answers to the question "Do you support the idea of Russia becoming part of the European Union?" are provided below (see Table 12).

Table 12. Answers to the question "Do you support the idea of Russia becoming part of the European Union?"

	Russian	Foreign
No	56%	17%
Difficult to answer	22%	33%
Yes	16%	42%
Indifferent	6%	8%

56% of Russian respondents are negative about this idea compared to only 17% of negative answers among foreign respondents. Affirmative answers concerning the prospective of Russia being part of the European Union were given by 16% of Russian respondents compared to 42 % of foreign respondents. Such difference of opinions can be explained by the Russians' willingness to keep their national identity, traditions and culture in general. Another reason can be present-day complicated political situation. However we can make a conclusion that the Europeans support the idea of extending a united socio-cultural space.

Answering the next question the respondents were asked to give associations with the phrase “Russian President”, which was aimed at studying the opinion about the Russian President among the Russians as well as foreign citizens.

The most frequent and equally rated (14%) answers in the Russian sample are “brave”, “cunning”, “strategist”, “stable”. Associations among foreign respondents include “ability to persuade” (33%), “intolerance” (11.7%), as well as such qualities as “macho”, “authoritarian”, “active”, “dangerous”, “strong” (around 7%). The answers demonstrate the differences in perceiving the president of Russia by the Russian and foreign citizens with the associations from the Russian sample showing more positive characteristics as compared to the predominantly negative characteristics in the foreign sample of data.

The next question is connected with studying the respondents’ opinion about the qualities which can bring nations together.

The following qualities prevail in both samples: cooperation, communication (20.8% of Russian respondents and 27.7% of foreign respondents), kindness (19.5% of Russian respondents), tolerance (8.5% of Russian respondents and 11.9% of foreign respondents). Russian respondents value sympathy and family (10 and 11% respectively); foreign respondents are concerned about national catastrophes (8%) and injustice (8%). It is peculiar that foreign respondents consider factors causing danger and destruction to the nation among the uniting factors whereas Russian respondents point out only positive values.

The next question is connected with studying the respondents’ opinion about the qualities which separate nations. While analyzing the answers to this question we put aside the answer counting 1% or less and focused on more frequent results. Thus the most frequent negative and destructive qualities are intolerance (19% of Russian respondents and 30% of foreign respondents), insult (17% of Russian respondents and 3.6% of foreign respondents), politics (19% of foreign respondents and 2% of Russian respondents), violence (12% of Russian respondents and 3.6% of foreign respondents), lust for power (11% of foreign respondents and 2% of Russian respondents), nationalism/racism (8.1% of Russian respondents and 3.6% of foreign respondents). In addition Russian respondents point out hatred and envy (15 and 11% respectively) as well as unwillingness to learn something new (2%) as the factors separating nations. According to both samples in our survey the universal reason of separating people of different nationalities is intolerance.

Respondents’ associations with the phrase “national character” are given below. In the Russian sample the following qualities are predominant: firm, lazy, open, pushy, persistent, kind, strong, stern. Foreign respondents pointed out the following qualities: wayward, patient (each quality 11.2%), emotional (10.8%), hard-working, patriotic, proud, educated, disciplined, intolerant, reserved, rude, melancholic (each quality 5.6%). It is remarkable that the qualities in the Russian sample do not correspond to the qualities in the foreign sample. Thus these results demonstrate strong differences in self-perception of the Russians on the one hand and the perception of the Russians by other nations on the other hand.

The next question concerns the respondents’ associations with the phrase “Russian soul”. It is necessary to note that the answers counting 1% or less are excluded from our analysis and are not reflected in the bar chart above. The Russian sample includes the following most frequent associations with the notion “Russian soul”: broad, generous (25 and 23% respectively), open, patient (12 and 11% respectively), as well as hospitable, beautiful (each quality 3%). Foreign respondents value readiness for help and kindness (16.7% and 8.33% respectively). The following qualities were mentioned only in the foreign sample: optimistic, happy people, brave, persistent, consistent, impulsive (each quality 8.33%). Such associations as “deep”, “literature”, “ready to help”, “kindness” are of different frequency in each sample of data.

Respondents’ associations with the phrase “Russian culture” are given below. Associations which count less than 1% were excluded from the analysis as accidental and lacking frequency.

In the Russian sample the following associations prevail: diverse and many-sided (30 and 28% respectively), cultural heritage (21.9%). Foreign respondents give the following associations: rich (39%), old (17%), ballet (11%), secluded, great literature (each category 5.5%). The association typical of both samples is “rich” (28% and 39% in the Russian and foreign samples respectively).

#### 4. Conclusion



The process of globalization presupposes two extreme tendencies typical of all countries and cultures involved in this process: establishing contacts, sharing traditions, opinions and attitudes, spreading the ideas of political correctness and tolerance on the one hand, and protecting national identity, struggling for cultural independence, intercultural clashes and discrepancy of historically predetermined cultural and national values on the other hand. In this connection the main reasons of misunderstanding among nations pointed out in the course of study are connected with lack of coordination in the sphere of politics, different mentalities and religious intolerance. As a result the main reasons of confrontation between Europe and Russia as viewed by the respondents include struggle for leadership in the world and different national mentalities. Russian respondents put emphasis on political and socio-cultural differences and for the most part do not support the idea of integrating into the European Union.

The President of the Russian Federation is viewed by foreign respondents as an authoritarian, characterized by the ability to persuade. Russian respondents perceive the President as brave, cunning, stable, strategist. Positive attitude to the Russian President can be the reflection of the fact that Russian respondents managed to adapt themselves to the existing political regime, have prospects for the stable position in society and hope that present-day problems will be solved in the future.

According to our data the main concepts bringing nations together include cooperation, communication and kindness as the basic means of human interaction as opposed to such qualities as intolerance and insult, causing hatred and violence.

Self-evaluating their national qualities, Russian respondents consider persistence and openness as predominant features of the Russian character, as well as laziness as a negative quality. The concept of the Russian soul according to our data is based on such properties as “broad” and “generous”, the Russian culture is self-characterized as rich, many-sided, connected with cultural heritage.

According to N. Berdyayev (2004, p. 19), the Russian soul was formed by the broadness of geographical space, that is why the Russian people do not bind themselves to form, organization, law or order. The Russian character is made up of contradictions which cannot be explained by the scholars: “why the most anti-state people created the greatest and strongest state system; why the most anarchic people is so subject to bureaucracy; why the most free-spirited people does not seem to live a free life?”.

However self-evaluation of the features of national character cannot be considered absolutely objective. This part of our research, the first part can be observed in E.A. Kostina, A.M. Egorychev, A. Rieger (2014), is an attempt to point out and compare the concept of the Russian national character from different angles, to differentiate between real qualities, auto- and hetero-stereotypes, to find the qualities and values which can provide the basis for successful intercultural communication. In this respect the following concepts proved to be equally valued by both groups of respondents: Patriotism, Pride, Industry, Family, Tolerance, Kindness, Faith, Spirituality, Mercy, Openness, Literary heritage.

The prospects of cross-cultural research are connected with further analysis of national and universal values as reflected in patterns of behaviour, reactions and attitudes in the context of intra-cultural and intercultural communication, when the dramatic differences between social groups or nations become acutely obvious.

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